

Helen Stories – from Annabeth

[2017 Aug 27th] Hey Mikey —

Elaine reminded me that you want to have “stories” from us (which I am ashamed to say I totally forgot about doing.) So now it is in my mind, and you will have more of these little missives coming your way than you can even imagine! So after a few of them, let me know if these are at all what you had in mind, or if I should slant things some different direction, or what.

Hi, Annabeth -

Bonnie and I returned from the cabin this afternoon to discover your photos and stories - thank you so much! Yes, this is EXACTLY the type of entries I was hoping for! I haven't been able to download all the photos yet, but I will be working on it - but I love the stories, and the 'extra' story about Doug and the champagne opening!

Yes, whenever you think of another, please send it along! Especially stories of you and Jerry and Helen growing up 'poor in El Paso' which is the way I remember Helen telling it. Do you know where the car accident happened - at age 5 or so, Helen was 'hit by a car' and her ear was left 'hanging on by a thread' - which, later, Mama said, 'hanging on by a thread? it was a scratch!' or some such counter-story.

- Mike

"Swimming hole" up at the mine

Did you ever see the place where we lived up on the hill between two of the mines that Daddy supervised?

It was just 4 frame houses, painted green with white trim, built and placed there by the mining company as residences for the top few officials for the mines. It was Daddy (Superintendent), Ivan (Somebody) as Bookkeeper, Gary Rickman as Mechanical Engineer, and our Uncle Bob Raines (husband of Mama's sister Nina) as chief electrician. There was a simple 2-strand barbed wire fence that enclosed an area that may have been 5 acres or so — all just bare native scrub brush and wire-stiff grasses. The fence was minimal at best — sort of a “suggestion” to keep wild donkeys from wandering into the area I think. And we were of course NEVER to go outside of that fence!

Daddy had had pipelines installed to bring mine water over to the houses to use for toilets and gardening, but we couldn't drink it — we had huge bottles

of water delivered and placed in a dispensing stand for drinking and cooking. Daddy also had electricity furnished to the houses by way of a generator that was located near the houses, and it was always getting hit by lightening in the storms (We were at about 7000 feet altitude.) And then of course they had laid sewer lines to carry all the waste water away from the houses. That was easy — we were perched on the side of hill that extended a mile or so down to the little town of Hanover — no problem with drainage!

There was, I hope you can see, absolutely NOTHING to do there. In the mornings, we would have breakfast, and Mama would send us out “to play”. She would call us in to get a drink of water every now and then, and call us in for lunch, and make us take a nap in the afternoon and then back out to play till dinner time. I have no idea how we filled out time. I was terminally bored the entire time.

There were a few other kids there — I guess that’s how we spent our time. The Rickmans had a boy about Jerry’s age; and Aunt Nina had several kids — first Bob who was maybe 1-2 years younger than Jerry, then Alan a year or so after that, then a daughter Jodie, and then a 4th kid who I don’t remember.

Anyway, one day there was some great excitement! Somebody (probably either our cousin Bob or the Rickman kid) came excitedly to tell us that they had found a swimming hole that we could go get in and cool off! Wow! None of us had ever known of such a thing around there, so we hurried off with the “messenger” to see what this marvelous pastime would look like.

Uh-oh! It was Outside The Fence! But — heck, that fence was totally simple to get through, so we did it. And there, just a little way down the hill was indeed this sort of pond of water! So we probably took off our shoes, but likely nothing more, and waded in to it. It was sort of murky, but nothing around there was particularly “nice”, so that didn’t bother us any.

Well, we were having a lovely time playing around there, when one or more of the mothers must have missed us, and they came looking for us. (There’s always a downside to any time you’re having fun, right?) They were FURIOUS at us! WAY more than seemed reasonable, even in view of the fact that we had gone Outside The Fence. We all got hauled home hastily and bathed and fussed over something fierce. It was all quite beyond anything that made sense to us.

It was only years later that I learned that the lovely “swimming hole” we were frolicking away was in fact the cesspool where all of the raw, totally untreated sewage for all 4 houses drained to!

Helen and the candy corn

When we were little, Mama always gave us a weekly allowance. It was very little, but we were always tutored on money management issues, urging us to save part of it to collect up for something “big”, and then spend the remainder on whatever we cared to. The amount was geared somewhat to our ages, and what each of us was interested in.

Jerry & I were considered the “same” age, and Helen was “the younger one”. I am imagining that our allowances were in the range of 25-35 cents (remember the years now!), and Helen’s would have been 10-15 cents less.

OK, fine. I dutifully saved part of my allowances and bought things I wanted for school; Jerry did a lot of model airplane things with his. But Helen would go straight to the grocery store that was on the way from our house to the school, and she would spend her **WHOLE ALLOWANCE** on one or more bags of candy corn (or some other bag of candies or gum). I of course was appalled, and tried (since I of course considered myself to be “in charge of her” when we were not with Mama!) to talk her out of such rampant hedonism.

But what I did not know until much later was what she did with those bags of candies. She would take a bag to school (which was questionable in itself); she would open it up (!!!) and have all of the candies out separate, and **SELL** them individually to the other kids in her class.

Of course she probably tripled her initial investment (or more), but I was simply mortified when I learned of this “shameful” behavior!

Mama was delighted of course.

Gee, I wonder how she came to have all of the businesses she did there in Albuquerque??!

Doug popping the champagne bottle

the first thing that popped into my mind was this delightful little moment at our wedding reception.

Forthwith the story of the moment! Others to follow at totally random intervals!

Doug was a most welcome guest at our wedding at St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Atlanta. His wife also attended, but stayed largely in the background.

But Doug was cheerful and eager to meet others at the wedding, and generally a lot of fun. And then he became absolutely central to the whole show when it came time for the champagne toast — nobody could get the bottle open! So he (MOST cheerfully!) stepped forward and opened it up with a graceful flourish, and everyone applauded!

Our photographer extraordinaire captured that moment in the photos also — I'll send it and several others also. Prolly take 2-3 emails to do it.

Lots of love — AB